

[Article A] Barbara Wujciak: A Female Midshipman Rocks the Boat

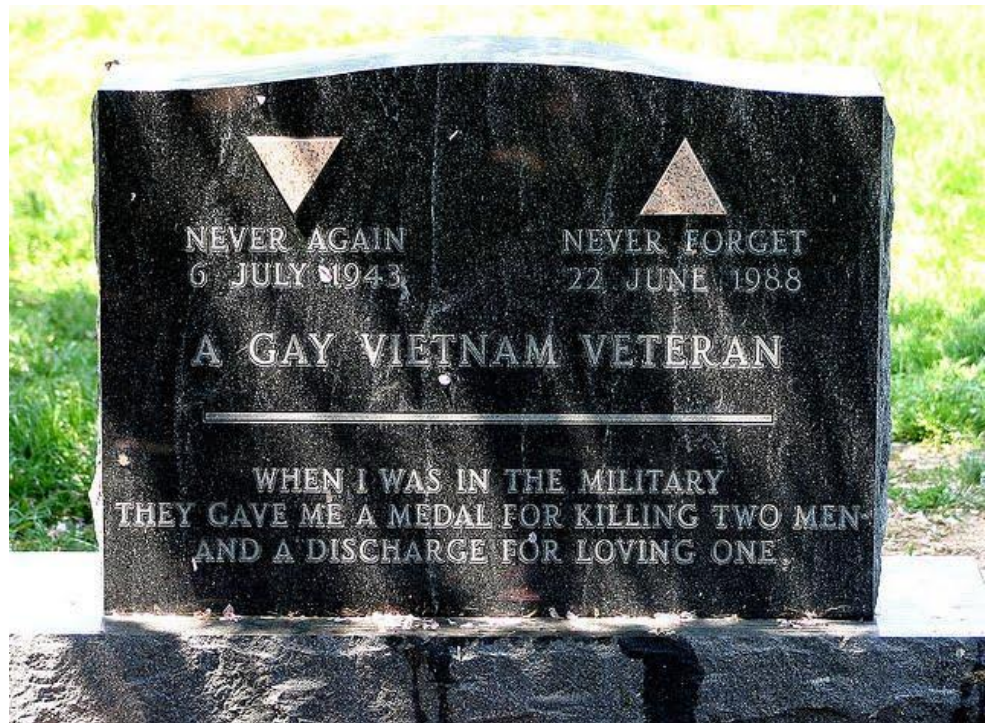
Background: In the fall of 1975, the first women plebes (freshmen) entered Annapolis to attend the United States Naval Academy. That was the first year women were allowed to attend any of the military service academies in the United States. A few years later, a high school junior named Barbara Wujciak toured the Naval Academy and set her sights on joining the Navy. In a 2011 interview Wujciak fondly recalled, “At the time when I was really seriously looking at colleges, you know, I was pretty focused on the Academy. Because one, you got a good education. Number two, it was much more of a challenge mentally. And the other thing is you had a job afterwards.... Plus, you know, I’m not your typical girl. I wasn’t into clothes or fashion or anything like that, so they told you what to wear every day, you know, I didn’t have to make any decisions. That kind of stuff.” Wujciak applied for admission with the incoming class of 1979 and was rejected. She remembered, “They didn’t know what to do with women, especially in the Navy because women couldn’t go on combatant ships at the time, so your jobs afterwards were quite limited. So, they were only accepting a hundred women per class.” A class was typically 1,000-1,200 midshipmen. The following year Wujciak reapplied and was admitted for the fall of 1980.

Wujciak enjoyed her first year at the Academy and performed well in classes as well as in physical examinations. She joined a club softball team and found it easy to make friends with fellow plebes and upperclassmen. That summer she and a graduate of the class of 1981, a friend from the softball team, began to date. In the fall of 1981, Wujciak was optimistic about continuing her commitment to the Navy. A grievance with a roommate became cause for concern when Wujciak’s personal correspondence with her partner was stolen and turned over to superiors. Although heterosexual relationships were acceptable for midshipmen, LGBT relationships were against protocol. Between October and Thanksgiving of 1981, Wujciak stood trial. Almost all of her friends and associates, including most of the softball team, were questioned about the nature of her relationship.

In the end Wujciak was forced to leave the Academy and her partner was discharged from the Navy. Wujciak later found that it was the stolen letter that provided the necessary evidence to convict her. Looking back on the experience Wujciak recalls, “You know times were different.... I mean, nobody was out, there were no gay icons.... There was nobody....” Wujciak was by no means the first or last person to be discharged from military service for being gay. A few years before, in the mid-1970s, an Air Force Sergeant, Vietnam Veteran, and Bronze Star recipient, Leonard P. Matlovich, was discharged after coming out. Matlovich took his case to court and the judge ordered his reinstatement. Rather than reinstating him, the Air Force offered Matlovich a cash settlement. Matlovich passed away in June 1988 and his headstone reads, “When I was in the military, they gave me a medal for killing two men and a discharge for loving one.” In addition to her civilian career, in 2009 Wujciak joined the Air Force Reserves as a Chief Optometrist.



Barbara A. Wujciak attired in service dress whites with cap, 1980.



Leonard Matlovich's headstone,
Congressional Cemetery, Maryland